

NOT JUST A PHASE, IT'S A RECKONING: AN OPEN LETTER TO ANTI-SEXUAL VIOLENCE PARTNERS IN TEXAS

Dear partners,

The egregious murder of George Floyd belies the dreams and promise of liberty and justice for all.

While his death has shaken us to our core, it is the Black community that is enduring, yet again, the trauma of a reprehensible injustice. This disconnect has revealed the blinding privilege that's enabled systemic racism in our country for centuries.

I've struggled for days with TAASA's response to recent events, because at this point, words feel meaningless. A statement feels inadequate. The nature of this moment calls for more than words on a page.

But it must be said so that there is no doubt: We believe Black Lives Matter. TAASA has and continues to support the work of the Black Lives Matter movement.

Their work and the work of countless other grassroots organizations addressing systemic racism is inextricably linked to the anti-sexual violence movement.

I'm inspired by many of the statements of solidarity from various organizations and leaders, yet I find myself drawn to those with solid next steps. I have aspired to provide the same.

TAASA has taken many steps toward equity, but our work is only beginning. Our board and membership passed a resolution to formally declare TAASA as an anti-racist, anti-oppression organization. Our core values include an unwavering commitment to inclusion and intersectionality in our approach to our work.

But I know this is not enough.

We MUST expand beyond our comfort zone to listen and understand the realities of the Black community as we pursue our work. It is with our unequivocal support for the Black community that I invite you to join TAASA to actively address systemic racism in the anti-sexual violence movement.

Please note that this is not an exhaustive list or road map; it is simply an initiation of first steps.

WE MUST HOLISTICALLY UNDERSTAND SYSTEMIC RACISM AND HOW IT RELATES TO OUR WORK IN THE ANTI-SEXUAL VIOLENCE MOVEMENT.

The historic context of our systems was built on a foundation of inequity over 400+ years ago. The subjugation, oppression, and inequity on full display with the atrocious murder of George Floyd are elements found in sexual violence incidents across the state.

Failed responses go beyond one or more bad actors; this is about addressing a myriad of systems. It is literally a question of life or death.

[Click here](#) to learn more about systemic racism. [Click here](#) for a list of anti-racism resources.

WE MUST IDENTIFY HOW SYSTEMIC RACISM PLAYS OUT IN OUR ORGANIZATIONS.

We must engage in the courageous conversations necessary to embark on this journey. We must also be introspective and identify how we as leaders have continued to enable this insidious sin of status quo. If you think this is tough, it pales in comparison to the trauma and pain systemic racism has caused Black people in America. In 2017, the Institute of Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault at UT Austin School of Social Work completed its Victim Services Occupation Information and Compensation Experiences Survey ([VOICES](#)) at Texas programs and found those who identify as Black had a high turnover prediction rate. In other words, Black staff are more likely to leave the field than their counterparts.

Voices from the Field: How can we improve inclusion?

“Just more transparency & honesty regarding cultural differences, microaggressions, & unconscious bias (both intentional & unintentional) & how those affect any workplace.”

“People of color need to be in senior management or board leadership roles. Real inclusion & real diversity isn’t going to be part of our work until everyone has an equal seat at the table--not just white, heterosexual, non-transgender women with college educations.”

Another helpful resource by @fairbudgetDC contains additional ways nonprofits can address anti-Blackness:

- ✓ Hire Black staff, particularly senior staff members, and allow them to participate in a fair negotiation price
- ✓ Proactively ensure Black staff members are able to take time off during times of racial violence
- ✓ Seek out and appropriately pay Black consultants to guide organizations on strategic racial issues rather than forcing Black employees to relive trauma to educate
- ✓ Have an official, documented process for Black staff to report microaggressions: (note: educate yourself on microaggressions)
- ✓ Consider and actively seek out Black-owned businesses as potential business partners for consulting work and contracts
- ✓ Support Black-led organizations, include them in funding requests, subgrant to them, connect their leader with your funders, uplift their work;
- ✓ Be crystal clear in your assessment of your own role in white supremacist structures and have a plan on how you will move forward
- ✓ Actively recruit Black board members

Lastly, in order to begin addressing how systemic racism plays out in our organizations, we must begin the conversation about white privilege. This topic has been evaded for fear of reprisal and defensiveness. We can no longer avoid it. The time is now. If we are serious about addressing systemic racism, this discussion is imperative to our success. We are in the process of developing a comprehensive web site page with resources for sexual violence organizations on addressing anti-racism and anti-blackness. Visit taasa.org/anti-racism and continue to check in as we build out this page.

WE MUST ACTIVELY WORK TO BE AN ANTI-RACIST ORGANIZATION.

The Sexual Assault Demonstration Initiative (SADI), the first large-scale project of its kind, was created to enhance sexual assault outreach, services, and community partnerships in dual/multi-service programs. Six sites across the nation engaged in a four-year process of assessment, planning, and implementation of new and enhanced services and organizational capacity building. [Click here](#) to access the materials that were developed based on the lessons learned across project sites. The first **evidence-based lesson** is unwavering: “Truly effective and accessible sexual assault services cannot happen if the program does not have an understanding and direct response to racism and oppression.” The National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC) provides an **E-learning site** with tools to address this topic.

There are many other nuances to discuss as we continue this journey together. If we are serious about our vow to address sexual assault in the state of Texas, we must commit to addressing systemic racism as a part of this work. It will not happen overnight, and it will surely uncover deep sorrow and pain for all involved.

But we have to put in the work.

I know we are up for the challenge.

I’ve personally witnessed heroic acts of kindness and solutions as we addressed and continue to navigate the unprecedented pandemic of COVID-19. I have full faith that our strength and resolve will also guide us as we tackle the enormous public health crisis of racism.

I am here to assist and learn alongside each of you as we work toward a safer Texas.

In Service,



Rose Luna